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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#)
SUBJECT: INFLUENTIAL AL-SABAH PREDICTS CONSTITUTIONAL
DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT WITHIN ONE MONTH

REF: A. KUWAIT 836
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 566
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 522
[1](#)D. KUWAIT 430
[1](#)E. KUWAIT 317
[1](#)F. 06 KUWAIT 4498
[1](#)G. 06 KUWAIT 4430

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary and comment. An influential, younger Shaykh in the inner circle of the ruling family told the Ambassador June 4 that there was a "90% chance" the Amir would dissolve Parliament within a month and call for end of summer elections. Shaykh Mohammed Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah believed most Kuwaitis would support the move. He predicted opposition MPs, who won a parliamentary majority in last summer's elections, would make further gains. By making MPs spend considerable money on their re-election campaigns, Shaykh Mohammed said the dissolution would send a signal that the Amir would not tolerate bickering at the expense of development in the country. He was nonetheless skeptical that the new Parliament would differ significantly from the current one and predicted another constitutional dissolution next summer. Shaykh Mohammed said regional circumstances and the possible U.S. reaction were not factors in the leadership's thinking on dissolution. While focusing his criticism on Parliament, Shaykh Mohammed also lamented the lack of strong leadership within the ruling family and said he could foresee a Prime Minister from outside the Al-Sabah family being appointed in the next three to five years. These political developments could affect the Amir's planned private travel to the U.S. this summer.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Comment: While appearing increasingly likely, the dissolution of Parliament could be prevented, at least for the time being, by the resignation or replacement of Oil Minister Shaykh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, who opposition MPs are threatening to "grill" for comments he made in support of another senior ruling family member accused of embezzlement. If this happens, he would be the third minister forced out of the Cabinet in the last seven months by MPs from the three opposition blocs. Rather than resolving tensions, this would likely merely embolden opposition MPs to go after other ministers. Complicating the issue is the fact that some opposition groups stand to gain from elections under the new electoral system adopted last summer and may, therefore, be intentionally stoking tensions with the Government in the hope of provoking a dissolution. Some members of the ruling family are rumored to be doing the same thing through loyalists in Parliament in an attempt to discredit the institution and gain popular support for an unconstitutional dissolution. In this context, a compromise solution is unlikely, suggesting it is going to be a long, hot summer in Kuwait. We see no serious consequences for U.S. interests

emerging in the short term from the Kuwaitis' domestic political problems, particularly regarding key foreign and security policy issues. End summary and comment.

¶3. (S/NF) An influential member of the ruling family told the Ambassador June 4 that there was a "90% chance" Parliament would be dissolved shortly after the expected "grilling" of Oil Minister Shaykh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah on June 25 and new elections held in late-August or early-September. Shaykh Mohammed Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah (36), who wields considerable influence by virtue of his lineage - he is the elder of two surviving grandsons of Mubarak Al-Kabir, the founder of modern Kuwait - and close relations with the Amir and other senior members of the ruling family, said the Al-Sabah leadership is fed up with the political deadlock and lack of progress in the country, problems it blames on constant opposition from Parliament. "The Amir has given (opposition MPs) every possible chance for adult discourse," he said. "Unfortunately, we haven't found that on the other side." Having publicly ruled out an unconstitutional dissolution earlier this year (ref B) and formed a new Cabinet in March (ref D), the Amir now hopes to resolve tensions between the Government and Parliament by holding elections under the new five constituency electoral system adopted last summer, which some observers argue will yield more qualified, less parochial MPs, Shaykh Mohammed said.

¶4. (S/NF) Shaykh Mohammed believed the move would be supported by most Kuwaitis, who are increasingly frustrated with Parliament and disillusioned with the results of last year's elections, which many believed would usher in an era of reform and progress. He was skeptical, however, that the new Parliament would differ significantly from the current

KUWAIT 00000882 002 OF 003

one either in terms of its composition or its attitude towards the Government. He predicted opposition MPs would make further gains in the elections, using the dissolution as proof that "corrupt" members of the ruling family were trying to prevent the investigation and prosecution of former Minister of Oil and Minister of Finance Shaykh Ali Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah on charges of embezzling more than \$100 million during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. In particular, Shaykh Mohammed believed more "populists," liberals, and independent Islamists and fewer pro-Government independents would be elected, making it difficult for Jassem Al-Khorafi to be re-elected as Speaker and perhaps opening the way for veteran opposition MP Ahmed Al-Saadoun to regain the speakership. He predicted the women's vote would again benefit tribal and Islamist candidates, and vote-buying would still be prevalent, though cheaper: 250-300KD (\$865-\$1,040) per vote rather than 1000KD (\$3,470) as in past elections.

¶5. (S/NF) While officially the head of the Citizens' Services Agency and the Government Assessment Body, Shaykh Mohammed said he was also responsible for negotiating with MPs and political groups "to see what sort of favors we (the ruling family) can give them in return for their support on particular issues." In this unofficial capacity, he met with the majority of MPs over the past week to discuss the Oil Minister grilling and reported that they were "very scared" about shouldering the costs of another election, particularly in the summer when air conditioning usage and costs soar (air conditioning an election tent when it's 110 degrees in the shade isn't cheap). Shaykh Mohammed said political groups, even the highly-organized Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), were uncertain how to campaign in the new, larger electoral districts and that part of the strategy in holding early elections was to prevent them from getting sufficiently prepared. The elections would also give observers a chance to see how the new system works in order to better prepare for the next elections.

¶6. (S/NF) Shaykh Mohammed Al-Abdullah said some members of the ruling family, implicitly including himself, supported an

unconstitutional dissolution - suspending Parliament for two to three years in order to move stalled legislation - but that this was unlikely to happen in the current political context. Instead, he predicted continued tensions with Parliament would result in another constitutional dissolution next summer, particularly if the next Cabinet, like the last one, was chosen primarily to accommodate the various political blocs in Parliament. Shaykh Mohammed complained that this strategy had only resulted in bringing the disputes between the blocs into the Government. He believed the catalyst for the second dissolution would be an agreement between one of the opposition blocs in the new Parliament and the Government to pass the controversial Build-Operate-Transfer law, which would lead MP Ahmed Al-Saadoun to grill either the Finance Minister or the Prime Minister, provoking the dissolution. According to him, the rationale behind the dissolutions was to force MPs to spend considerable amounts of their personal wealth getting re-elected and demonstrate that the Amir would not tolerate their constant attacks on the Government at the expense of development.

17. (S/NF) When asked, Shaykh Mohammed said regional tensions had "zero impact" on the leadership's calculus on whether or not to dissolve Parliament. He explained that, based on the experience of the Iraqi invasion, the ruling family believed Kuwaitis would remain united even if the U.S. attacked Iran, Iran attacked Kuwait, or a civil war broke out in Lebanon. Although most Kuwaitis believe the Amir would not dare dissolve Parliament unless he received a "green light" from the U.S., Shaykh Mohammed said this was obviously not the case and "no one in the leadership has mentioned this as a factor at all." His assessment was that Kuwait was not important enough to the U.S. for the Administration to get involved in such internal matters, particularly when the ruling family would never resort to "heavy-handed tactics" and the majority of Kuwaitis would support a dissolution. "As long as we don't use tear gas or take political prisoners, you will not intervene," he argued. The Ambassador said he did not wish to offer any comment based on hypotheticals, but cautioned against making assumptions about the USG reaction in the event of an unconstitutional dissolution.

18. (S/NF) While focusing his criticism on the Parliament, Shaykh Mohammed also lamented the absence of strong leadership within the ruling family, which he argued was the ultimate source of the political problems facing the country. He complained, for example, that if the Parliament was

KUWAIT 00000882 003 OF 003

dissolved the current leadership would be unwilling to pass long-stalled legislation by Amiri decree during the dissolution period, which would put the onus on the new Parliament to overturn it. Such strong decision-making and leadership was critically lacking, he argued. Shaykh Mohammed said the Prime Minister was "not doing a good job of playing the groups off each other" and predicted that in three to five years time, Kuwait could well have a Prime Minister who is not from the Al-Sabah family.

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LeBaron